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ABSTRACT

We have just completed the most successful year in American Federation of Teachers (AFT) history with 20 percent increase in membership and progress in many areas. The year's most significant developments are these: 1) AFT, through participation in the Full Funding Committee coalition, succeeded in winning bigger appropriations for federal aid than ever before. 2) Efforts to include paraprofessionals in the union had been successful in Philadelphia, New York, and Newark. 3) Since the 1956 expulsion of southern locals which refused to integrate, organizing has been difficult but is now progressing on an integrated basis; situations in Georgia, Tennessee, Texas, New Orleans, and Florida are encouraging. 4) In the fight against anti-teacher injunctions, Hawaii and Pennsylvania have already passed laws allowing teachers to strike under certain circumstances. 5) Union action has exposed and forestalled many such panacea schemes as educational vouchers, performance contracting, and differentiated staffing. I would like to see the Full Funding Committee expanded into a kind of "children's lobby." We continue to be active on the civil rights front. Nothing has come of our efforts toward the uniting of AFT and the National Education Association for teacher unity. Now we must increase the Militancy Fund to support such improvements as our More Effective Schools plan which continues to demonstrate that good teachers with smaller classes and time for planning can educate children despite the problems. This is a summary of a speech delivered by President David Seldon to the membership of the American Federation of Teachers. (JS)

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THE STATE OF OUR UNION

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THE PRESIDENT'S REPORT TO THE 54th ANNUAL CONVENTION OF THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS/AUG. 17, 1970
PITTSBURGH HILTON HOTEL
PITTSBURGH, PA.

DAVID SELDEN/PRESIDENT

AFT

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THE STATE OF OUR UNION: 1970

REPORT OF DAVID SELDEN, PRESIDENT

We have just concluded the most successful year in AFT history. For the past ten years, of course, every year has set a new record in membership increases, but the past year has been nothing short of spectacular! Our total increase was 35,000 members. In percentage of increase over the previous year this is 20%. Only in one previous year, 1963-64, have we equalled this growth rate and in that year the harvest from the collective bargaining victory in New York City accounted for much of the gain.

We have gained in absolute terms also. Ten years ago we included less than 4% of the teacher work force in our membership. As I speak to you today our percentage has risen to 12%. I see no reason why that percentage will not continue to rise. Many different explanations can be given for this increase, but all I want to say is that we must be doing something right!

The past year has been a period of almost frantic activity for all of us: officers, headquarters staff, organizers, clerical staff, and the thousands of rank and file volunteers at the local level who are the backbone of the AFT. Strikes, negotiations, legislative action, political activity, action on the civil rights front throughout the nation -- from kindergarden to college level, the AFT has been busier than ever before. This activity has produced substantial gains for teachers, not only for the teachers who are represented by AFT bargaining agents, but for all teachers as other organizations have been forced into militant activity in order to meet our competition.

I want to single out what I consider to be the five most significant AFT developments since our previous convention.

1. The Battle in Congress

It is no secret that the Nixon Administration is opposed to spending more money on education. Yet, in spite of the failure of the U. S. Commissioner of Education to ask for more funds, and in spite of the veto of federal education legislation, and in spite of repeated statements by the President that he considers money spent on education ill-advised and inflationary -- unlike money spent on anti-ballistic missles and supersonic transports -- in spite of this obstructionism in the White House, the AFT, through its participation with other organizations in the coalition called the Full Funding Committee, succeeded in winning bigger appropriations for federal aid than ever before.

The AFT has said over and over again that we cannot have good schools without spending good money. Good schools start first of all with good teachers, but even good teachers cannot perform unless they are given good working conditions. Good working conditions mean smaller class size, fewer classroom hours, better equipment, greater para-professional, remedial and psychological assistance, and more space. All of this costs money, and that money must be raised by the joint effort of local, state, and federal governments. The Full Funding Committee was formed for the purpose of inducing congress to pass legislation so that the federal government would do its share.

There are many organizations encompassed by the Full Funding Committee, but I think the members of that committee would agree that the most effective by far is the AFL-CIO. It was the AFL-CIO, using the same kind of muscle which kept us from being saddled by Judges Haynsworth and Carswell, which was able to provide the major power which generated our victory. It therefore comes with ill grace from our rival non-union organization to boast of its lack of affiliation and its isolation -- which it falsely calls "independence." In a society of over 200,000,000 people 2 million teachers cannot go it alone. We need all the allies we can find. The leaders of the NEA ought to be ashamed of themselves for trying to pretend that teachers do not need the support of the AFL-CIO. We know how valuable that support has been and we intend to maintain and strengthen our partnership with the rest of organized labor.

I also want to give credit here to the work of our Legislative Director, former AFT President Carl Megel. Although we have only a one-man department, Carl has covered the legislative front with the strength of ten.

2. Organizing Para-Professionals

In the section above, I mentioned "para-professionals". A few years ago most of us had to run to the dictionary to find out what a para-professional was. It is one of those terms that we in education seemed to find so irresistible. A cardinal principle of education is if you put a label on a problem you have solved it.

Para-professionals are more than a label, however. At the present time there are 300,000 teacher aides, school aides, teacher assistants, school attendants, and other para-professionals in the public schools of America. A high portion of these people are working in districts where the AFT is the bargaining agent. There can be no questioning the fact that these educational employees are desperately needed. They are needed to supplement the work of the teacher, not to supplant it. They are needed to free teachers from non-professional tasks so that teacher time can be used entirely for professional work.

There are some who believe that the AFT membership should be restricted to only fully qualified classroom teachers and that all other non-supervisory educational workers should be excluded. Certainly a valid argument could be made for this craft union concept. I am not here to repeat the craft union versus the industrial union war of the 30's. I do want to make this simple assertion, however: anyone who works for the board of education in a non-supervisory capacity and who is in a position to act as a scab or strike breaker ought to be brought into the union. It is hard enough for teachers to muster the strength to win strikes without having to do it over the opposition of co-workers.

Several years ago I became concerned with the slowness with which para-professionals were being brought into the AFT. I therefore went to the Industrial Union Department of the AFL-CIO -- where I had gone many times before -- and asked for financial assistance to mount a drive to organize para-professionals. Once again, the IUD responded favorably and a pilot organizing project was initiated in Philadelphia. At the same time, the United Federation of Teachers of New York City, began a para-professional organizing

drive of its own. Both these efforts have been outstandingly successful. Local #2 now represents some 8,000 para-professionals. With the support of teachers these educational employees have gained their first contract which includes seniority provisions and an increase in pay of over 140%. The Philadelphia campaign is reaching its climax at the present time. An election will be held in the next few weeks. We are confident of victory and we know we will be able to negotiate a good contract.

The very first contract covering para-professionals as a group within the school system was in still another district, however: Newark, New Jersey. We won the right to represent para-professionals and other non-teacher educational employees in a representation election last December. Para-professionals were involved in the negotiations and strike in Newark in February, and their contract showed the way for AFT locals elsewhere.

3. Rebirth of AFT Organizing in the South

In 1956 the AFT expelled from its membership all those locals which refused to integrate. This was a courageous action: more than 20% of the miniscule membership of the AFT was lopped off. We paid a heavy price for our courage. Until recently, AFT organizing throughout the south was all but impossible.

During the past year, however, in a half-dozen southern localities teachers have suddenly awakened and we are once more organizing -- this time on a racially integrated basis, of course. Our new local in Savannah now includes nearly a majority of the 1,500 teachers in that school system. Our locals in Atlanta and Mobile have shown steady growth. In Tennessee we have a new local in Memphis and we also, for the first time, have a State Federation of Teachers.

Special mention must be made of three southern organizing situations: Texas, New Orleans, and Florida. For the past five years we have refused to charter locals in Texas because we felt we could not protect out members from the reprisals which were sure to come from Texas school boards and superintendents. In spite of the fact that Texas has a huge non-union education association, the state has no tenure law and teachers who join the union have been fired as soon as the superintendent has learned of their action. I am proud to report that we now have a thriving local in Austin, Texas, and I am confident that this is only the beginning.

We should give a bow, too, to the brave teachers of Local 527, Orleans Parish Federation of Teachers. Local 527 is a true Phoenix. It has risen from the ashes of two losing strikes and it has come back strong. I predict that within two years the union will be the bargaining agent for New Orleans teachers.

Incidentally, I am sure you will be pleased to know that all that picketing across the street from our convention hotel in New Orleans finally brought success. The New Orleans City Council has passed a public accommodations ordinance which requires such establishments to serve anyone who enters, regardless of race.

Florida is another special situation. It is not easy to organize in Florida. We have made many attempts. As a matter of fact, way back in the stone age I organized a local -- long gone -- in Miami.

When the National Education Association and its Florida branch bumbled their way to defeat in their disastrous 1967 strike, many Florida teachers turned to the AFT for help. AFT officers and members of our organizing staff investigated, and with a pledge of $100,000 from the United Auto Workers, we began once more to try to bring Florida into the union.

The past three years have been rough sledding -- sledding is usually rough in Florida -- but our organization is now on a firm foundation. Even during this summer it has been growing and by the end of next year we expect our membership in Florida to permit further expansion of our activities.

4. Winning the Right to Strike

It is more than six years since the Saturday Review carried a little 1,000 word piece of mine called "Needed, More Teachers Strikes". In the interval since then that little essay has become the most reprinted article the Saturday Review ever published. It was the first time that anyone had ever publicly and boldly stated that teachers have a professional responsibility to strike when confronted with unprofessional working conditions and unprofessional salaries. We have said over and over again that we don't like strikes. But we have also said again and again that we support the "no contract - no work" principle. In my opinion, people who work without knowing what they are going to be paid are fools, beggars, or slaves.

It is, therefore, a flaw in our system of government to allow employer boards of education to use the coercive power of government to attempt to force teachers to work under unsatisfactory conditions. It was to dramatize this unfair situation that I publicly challenged the injunction issued in the strike in Newark last February. I was not eager to go to jail. I don't want to repeat that experience, but losing a month or two of freedom for a just cause is far preferable to living one's entire working life under an oppressive rule of law.

My action was intended to launch a state-by-state campaign to outlaw anti-teacher injunctions in the same way that the labor movement outlawed anti-labor injunctions through the Norris-LaGuardia Act. Two states, Hawaii and Pennsylvania have already passed laws which allow teachers' strikes under certain circumstances. This is only the beginning, and I am confident that in the years ahead we will see this right established in most, if not all the states where there is significant union membership. I want to pay a special tribute to Jim Crane and the officers of the Hawaii Federation of Teachers for the trail-blazing work which they did; I also want to pay tribute to John Ryan and my long-time friend, Margaret Root, for the persistent legislative work which they put forth in order to win enactment of the Pennsylvania law.

5. Repulsing the New Attacks on the Schools

Few of us can remember when American education was not under attack, but American education is now facing the most serious and most concerted attack in its history. Earlier I asserted that we can not have schools without spending good money. Yet there are many people who still do not accept this truth. We are now being subjected to a barrage of panecea proposals, each one of which promises to provide good education through some sort of magic. Educational vouchers, performance contracting, differentiated staffing, and a half-dozen other schemes have been put forth as ways to get more education without spending

more money. Most of these schemes are based on the idea that all we teachers need is a kick in the pants to make us teach faster.

I am sorry to say that development of many of these ideas have been paid for by the teachers themselves! The NEA, through its "TEPS" Commission and by action of several state education associations, has promoted ideas which would lead to merit rating and the erosion of licensing and certification standards. Union action has exposed and forestalled many of these schemes, but the danger is growing day by day.

The most dangerous new gimmick in education is so-called "performance contracting". The idea is extremely appealing -- solve all your problems by turning them over to somebody else, who in turn will guarantee -- on paper -- to do the job for you. Only a few months ago, performance contracting was being called an experiment. Today, more and more school districts are swinging into line.

How naive and foolish can we get! If the educational entrepreneurs have discovered some new method for educating children with less effort and expense than the public schools are now able to do the job, they have an obligation to share their special knowledge with us. If they have discovered a new educational wonder drug, they have an obligation to let everybody enjoy its benefits. There is no place in education for private monopoly of workable ideas.

As a matter of fact, what has been revealed so far about these new educational miracle men is not encouraging. In one experiment they were discovered "teaching to the test". They have gone back to methods which long ago were discarded by reputable educators. You may be interested in this quotation from the San Francisco Chronicle which goes back to 1903:

> "Margaret McKenzie, principal of the Hancock Grammar School, was hauled before the Board of Education for incompetence. The complaint was made by a 'bunch of unpromoted pupils and their indignant parents.'
> "She was accused of illegal issuance of medals, withholding monthly report cards and -- for not teaching Whittier's 'Snow Bound' or Bryant's 'Thanatopsis'!
> "Miss McKenzie, it was said, made a poor witness, 'owing to her propensity for over-explaining every answer.'"

The schools are our most pervasive social institution. In the years since World War II we have seen other social institutions -- the church, the family, the courts -- undermined and their influence weakened. Will our school system survive? We must resist these attacks with all the force we can command.

The Children's Lobby

I call upon all those who believe in good schools who want to work for good schools to unite together to produce the kind of money which will permit us to have good schools. I would like to see the Full Funding Committee expanded and its influence intensified. I would like to see a rebirth of the great labor progressive coalition formed to fight child labor laws, that group

of unionists and social reformers like John Dewey and Jane Adams called it "The Children's Lobby". I cannot think of a better title, and in the very near future I intend to explore with representatives of these groups to develop the idea of reconstituting that great humanitarian movement.

Civil Rights Activity

During the past year we continued to be active on the civil rights front. At the suggestion of Vice President John Desmond I called a meeting of representatives from Big City locals to study problems of defacto segregation of students and faculty. We found that many AFT locals have taken positive action to bring about faculty integration. The clauses relating to this question in the Philadelphia contract are outstanding and there are no schools in Philadelphia without bi-racial or multi-racial faculties. The United Federation of Teachers in New York City has taken the lead sponsoring a study course to prepare black and Puerto Rican candidates for the principal's examination in order to bring about a better balance in supervisory ranks.

You will also recall that questions were raised about possible discriminatory hiring practices at last years' convention hotel. We have found that discrimination in hotel hiring practices is widespread. We are not satisfied on this score, for instance, with our present hotel, but discriminatory practices are so widespread in the hotel industry that it is difficult to find a hotel which measures up to proper standards.

We have made efforts through the organizations belonging to the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights to start a campaign to bring about racial balance of hotel staffs. We hope to mobilize the combined weight of all organizations behind this effort.

Within the AFT itself, we have continued to bring about better racial balance on our own staff. The one new national representative hired during the year is black, for instance.

Teacher Unity

Two years ago when I announced my intention to run for the office of President of the American Federation of Teachers, I said that I would devote a major effort to uniting all teachers within one militant, self-governing organization. I announced that I was prepared to enter into negotiations with the Association of Classroom Teachers of the National Education Association to explore the possibilities of achieving teacher unity through merger.

There has been a great deal of distortion and downright falsehood circulated about my teacher unity proposal. Let me again stress the following points:

1) I repeatedly made it clear that it was not my intention to bring the AFT into the NEA, but rather to see if it were possible to develop a new organization which would include all teachers.

2) I have repeatedly stated that any serious merger proposal would be submitted to a referendum vote of the membership of the AFT. I trust our members and I am willing to let them decide what they want.

3) I repeatedly stressed that in any possible merger it would be essential in my view, to maintain AFL-CIO affiliation, but that again I would be willing to allow our members to decide that question by referendum.

4) I repeatedly warned against merger negotiations at the local or state level, except for possibly one or two experimental projects.

5) I repeatedly stated that in my view the best way to bring about unity is to intensify our AFT organizing efforts. I know as well as you do that the ruling bureaucracy in the NEA will not permit unity through merger as long as they have hope of stamping us out.

Despite our willingness to explore the possibility of settling our differences and uniting for the common good, just as the AFL and the CIO did 15 years ago, there have been no negotiations. Nearly a year ago, there was one exploratory meeting between the AFT Executive Committee and a committee of NEA representatives. Nothing came of it.

There is a great yearning among the teachers of America for the strength which comes through united effort. Teachers want to be able to speak with a single voice to the congress, to their state legislatures and to their school boards. We must, therefore, continue to make it clear that it is not we who stand in the way of teacher unity and power. It is the little click of self-serving bureaucrats and politicans who rule the NEA who continue to keep teachers divided. That group has now launched an expensive effort to run us into the ground. They have raised their national per capita to $25.00 per year, and they have announced their intention of employing an additional 1,000 staff members! I want to say one thing right here and now... I don't care how many staff members they hire and how much money they spend, there is one thing that they cannot buy, and that is the AFT union spirit!

We are going to continue to grow and perhaps a few years hence, when we have again doubled our membership, our non-union rival may be more amicable to discussing teacher problems with us than they are at the present time. So far as I am concerned we have made our offer to talk, it lies on the table waiting for a response, and I contemplate no further action on our part.

Militancy Fund

Earlier I said that there is no substitute for good money if you want good education. While so-called educational experts come up with scheme after scheme for providing more education for less money, one major educational plan continues to show success. The educational medicine men who want to peddle their snake oil don't like it, but the More Effective Schools plan continues to demonstrate that good teachers with smaller classes and plenty of time for planning can educate children in spite of the environmental handicaps they bring into the classroom. All the schools in our big city areas must be converted to MES but that will cost more money than we now are allotted. The only way to get money for More Effective Schools and other improvements is through teacher militancy.

When I talk about teacher militancy I am not talking about teachers going around with a chip on their shoulders, constantly angry. We may have good reason to be angry about the kind of support school systems get but we cannot bring

about the changes that are needed through rash, ill-considered expressions of pique. We in the AFT advocate the orderly process of collective bargaining and we know that we cannot have collective bargaining without the right to strike.

I have already commented about the need for restricting the power of courts to issue anti-teacher injunctions. However, even if we had the legal right to engage in strikes and work-stoppages we still would not be able to take effective strike action in many instances, because we do not have the proper financial support.

If I were to single out what I consider to be the single most important measure before this convention, it would be the proposal to increase per capita by 25 cents a month, beginning January 1, the proceeds to be earmarked for the AFT Militancy Fund. We vitally need this action. We have tried through every possible means to raise money for the militancy fund without a per capita increase. While we are grateful to all those locals that have done a good job in raising money for the militancy fund, even their fine efforts have not been enough. Therefore, we must go the same way that many other unions have chosen. We must have a militancy fund paid for out of regular per capita. There is no other way.

If you mean it when you say that no teacher should teach more than 20 children at a time, you will vote for the militancy fund.

If you mean it when you say no teacher should be required to teach more than 20 classroom hours a week, you will vote for the militancy fund.

If you mean it when you say teachers should control certification and licensing, you will vote for the militancy fund.

If you mean it when you say teachers should have a major voice in determining educational research and development you will vote for the militancy fund.

If you mean it when you say the AFT is the union for teachers, self-governing, strong, able to fight and win battles, you will vote for the militancy fund.

I mean all these things and I hope you do too.

Conclusion

Now the time has come to be done with formal welcoming and speech making. Now the time has come to plunge into the business of this convention. I have been proud to have been your president for the past two years. At this convention you will choose a president and 20 council members to serve for the next two years. I have been a member of the AFT since 1940. I have not always agreed with all the decisions that the various conventions have made, nor have I agreed with all the actions of the locals I have served as an officer. So long as I have my right to speak my piece I am satisfied. So be it, on with the convention.....